



AREOPAGUS PROCLAMATION

Volume 23 • No. 4 • July—Aug 2013

Altered States of Consciousness

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What is consciousness?

Try defining it before reading on.

If to be conscious means to be aware of one's own existence, thoughts, and surroundings — then certain modifications in the brain's normal waking and thinking beta wave state are often typical of what are known as *altered states of consciousness (ASCs)*.

Using such a definition, an ASC might refer to everything from daydreams and delirium to hallucinations, psychedelic experiences, and other conditions of perception induced by alcohol, drugs, or various types of meditation. An ASC would not, however, be produced by a coma because a coma is related to a state of unconsciousness.

Are altered states of consciousness dangerous, contrary to Christian values, or otherwise to be avoided?

We believe that the answer to this question is, "In many cases, yes — because of their association with the occult and/or sinful activity."

Many occult practices which are routinely used to induce ASCs are expressly forbidden by Scripture, e.g. Deuteronomy 18:10-12: "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his

A bimonthly thoughtletter published by the AIIA Institute PO Box 262 Monson, Maine 04464

daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you."

God does not say such things to prevent people from experiencing the fullness of life, but rather to warn us of danger.

The spirit realm is real. There actually are demons, there really is a devil, and Satan really is a destroyer (John 10:10).

In his book *5•Minute Apologetics for Today*, Ron Rhodes writes, "...mystical altered states of consciousness can be dangerous and can lead to harmful consequences. For example, such states have led to contact with spirits. Moreover, deep meditation has sometimes led to increased anxiety, confusion, and depression. It can hinder logical thought processes . . . The mystical goal of attaining a sense of oneness with all things — including a sense of oneness with God — lies in direct contradiction to the biblical view of the eternal distinction between God the Creator and His creatures. (Isaiah 44:6-8; Hebrews 2:6-8)."

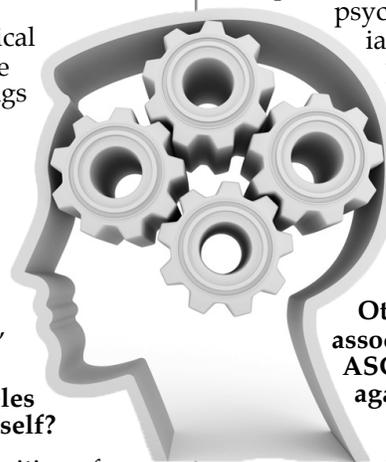
But aren't there examples of ASCs in the Bible itself?

Using the broadest definition of the term, one might make that case. But several key factors distinguish biblical experiences (e.g. revelation, visions, meditation on God's Word) from ASCs that are induced through sinful behavior or occult activity.

Marcia Montenegro of *Christian Answers for the New Era* writes: "The Bible does not teach or give examples of mystical experiences to draw near to God. We cannot bring ourselves closer to God through a technique or fantasized trip, but are brought near

God through Christ (John 16:24, Ephesian 2:13, I Timothy 2:5)." "We are to seek to understand God's Word with our minds, not to empty the mind, or to bypass the mind for a merging with God. We are distinct from God in our being; we cannot merge with God nor take on His eternal divine essence as our own."

John Ankerberg & John Weldon say this in their *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, ©1996 Harvest House: "Altered states are also widely utilized in the growing field of holistic, or New Age, medicine. In most forms of psychic diagnosis, psychic healing, and psychic surgery, altered states are considered essential. New Age techniques as diverse as Therapeutic Touch, chromotherapy (color healing), auric healing, meditation, biofeedback, hypnosis, hypnotic regression ('past life' therapy), radionics, shamanism, dream work, yoga, crystal healing, visualization, medical channeling . . . may utilize ASCs . . . Altered states are increasingly seen as a legitimate field of exploration, not only in aspects of modern education and medicine but in schools of psychotherapy — particularly transpersonal psychology — and especially in the multidisciplinary field of what is termed 'consciousness research.' Also, for many people, ASCs are perceived as the key to personal and spiritual development."



Other terms typically associated with the sort of ASC experiences warned against in Scripture:

- Contemplative spirituality, which employs ancient mystical practices to induce ASCs. Although it has its roots in the occult, it is often presented as a legitimate Christian pursuit, e.g. spiritual formation, centering prayer, "the silence," "the stillness," "ancient-wisdom," "spiritual disciplines" • hypnosis • trance states • possession states • channeling • mediumism • shamanism • yoga • kundalini arousal • directed visualization • guided imagery • lucid dreaming • drug-induced states • spiritism • mysticism • TM.

More Evidence in Defense and Confirmation of the Christian Faith